

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2002

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia is experiencing an outbreak of a low-pathogenic strain of avian influenza (AI). In the past few weeks, the virus has spread from fifteen poultry flocks to forty-six and has affected over one million birds. As you know, in late 1983 and early 1984 this same area experienced a similar situation when a low pathogenic strain of AI mutated into a high pathogenic strain in less than six months. USDA's assistance in eradicating the outbreak cost upwards of \$60 million. This quick response prevented a potential cost to consumers of up to \$5.6 billion according to USDA calculations. We urge USDA to take swift action to prevent the AI strain currently found in Virginia from escalating to a high pathogenic strain as it did in 1983-84.

The poultry industry is Virginia's largest agricultural enterprise, supporting 1,300 farm families and employing 12,000 people. Each processing job is estimated to create an additional 7.2 jobs outside of the poultry industry.

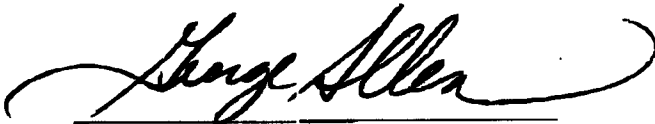
AI is having a significant economic impact on the poultry industry. It can be economically devastating to individual family farms, whose income derives from raising poultry, and to poultry processing companies that own the birds and have a substantial investment in feed manufacturing as well as processing and marketing. Disposal costs alone are likely to be hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the overall impact is already estimated to be millions of dollars.

Historically, USDA has not indemnified in cases of low pathogenic AI. However, given the risks associated with the current situation and previous experience in this region, we urge you to use your full discretion to make the maximum funds available to growers and the poultry industry. This is essential to contain the current outbreak before it becomes unmanageable. Low path AI can be highly contagious, and it is therefore of paramount importance to contain the virus through biosecurity precautions, monitoring, and proper dispensation of flocks in consultation with federal animal health officials. We appreciate the support shown by USDA thus far and look forward to working with you to resolve this crisis.

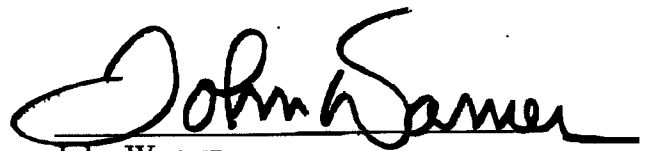
The Honorable Ann Veneman
April 15, 2002
Page 2

This issue is of the utmost urgency for the poultry industry in Virginia and could potentially escalate nationwide. Scientists have concluded this strain of AI is merely two amino acids away from a high pathogen form of AI. We appreciate your prompt consideration of this vital matter. If you need any assistance from our staffs or us please do not hesitate to contact our offices.

Sincerely,



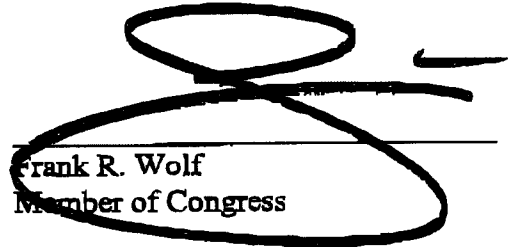
George Allen
U.S. Senator



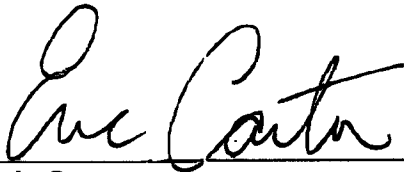
John Warner
U.S. Senator



Bob Goodlatte
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Eric Cantor
Member of Congress